

Mitigating Education Tourism in Nigeria Through the Implementation of Transnational Education (TNE)

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Abstract

This study explores how the implementation of Transnational Education (TNE) can serve as a strategic approach to mitigate education tourism in Nigeria—a trend characterized by the mass exodus of Nigerian students seeking tertiary education abroad. Utilizing a qualitative research design, data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with education stakeholders, including university administrators, policymakers, faculty members, and students. The findings reveal that TNE offers significant benefits, such as increased access to quality international degrees at reduced costs, the retention of human capital, and the strengthening of local institutions through foreign partnerships. However, the study also identifies several challenges hindering effective implementation, including inadequate regulatory frameworks, poor digital infrastructure, high programme costs, and quality assurance concerns. Participants emphasized the need for a comprehensive national TNE policy, capacity building for institutions, and public awareness campaigns to enhance uptake and credibility. The study concludes that while TNE holds strong potential to curb education tourism and promote sustainable development, its success in Nigeria depends on coordinated efforts by government, academia, and international partners.

Keywords: Mitigating, tourism, transnational education, stakeholders, infrastructure.

Introduction

A growing number of Nigerian students are pursuing foreign education due to factors like perceived higher education standards abroad, better opportunities, and the desire for personal and professional development. This trend, often referred to as education tourism, is driven by both push factors within Nigeria and pull factors in the host countries. The most common push factors

involve the economic, environmental, and/or political situation (Maringe & Carter, 2007) in the home country. Poor economic conditions, political instability, violation of human rights, systematic corruption, or lack of democratic rights at home country may spur a student to seek options overseas. Prospective students may envisage studying abroad as an opportunity to get away from poor conditions in the home country and live in a relatively better setting, at least for a period of time. Some pull factors, on the other hand, include perceptions of superior education standards and better opportunities and choices in foreign universities, as well as better socio-economic conditions/high standard of living (Ezel & Arasli, 2021).

According to the Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research (2024), Nigerians' quest for foreign university education is rising, with the UK, the United States, and Canada registering as top destinations. For instance, in the 2017/18 and 2021/22 academic sessions, the number of Nigerian students in the UK alone grew from 10,685 to 44,195, a 314% increase, the second-highest after India's 517% (ICEF Monitor, 2024). This trend impacts positively on the economy of the UK, but for Nigeria, which hardly attracts foreign students, this exerts tremendous pressure on its scarce foreign exchange.

According to the World Bank, Nigeria has 96,702 students studying abroad, and the figure keeps increasing with the UK, US, Canada, and Australia as the key choices for Nigerian students (ICEF Monitor, 2024). In the US alone, according to the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), the number of Nigerian students at US universities grew by 22.2% to 17,640 in the 2022/23 academic year from 14,438 in the previous year. The CBN problematized this scenario by indicating that between 2010 and 2020, foreign education expenses amounted to \$28.65 billion, which surpassed the \$16.65 billion required for Nigeria's annual imports in dollar payments in 1980 (CBN, 2024). In 2021/2022, Nigerian students contributed an estimated £1.9bn to the UK economy alone (SBM Intelligence, 2024). This represents a huge drain on the country's scarce foreign exchange with far-reaching consequences on the macroeconomic environment. When growing numbers of students travel overseas to study because of a shortage of supply of suitable local higher education, there is inevitably the resultant outflow of funds and the risk of 'brain drain', both of which hamper economic development.

Conceptualization of Trans-National Education (TNE) Higher education TNE is the delivery of degrees in a country or territory other than that where the awarding institution is based. It can

include, but not limited to, overseas campuses, distance learning, online provision, joint and dual degree programmes, double awards, fly-in faculty, and mixed models. Many universities in industrialized countries, for example, maintain branch campuses overseas and have students who are learning through face-to-face, blended or e-learning in other countries. This approach of internationalization in the provision of higher education transactions overseas is referred to as Trans-National Education. In simple etymology, the word “transnational” implies actions, practices, or contacts that extend or go beyond national boundaries. When used in combination with other concepts such as education, the term “transnational” still implies the idea of transactions across national borders, but with specific contextual meaning. This meaning holds for all types and modes of delivery of higher education, study programmes, or sets of courses of study, or educational services including distance education, where learners are located in a country different from where the awarding institution is based. Such programmes may belong to the education system of a State different from the State in which it operates, or may operate independently of any national education system in line with the UNESCO and the Revised Code of Good Practice in the Provision of Transnational Education developed by the Council of Europe and UNESCO and recognized by the United States as good practice in that area.

Justification for Trans-National Education

The increase in the demand for education globally which has led to an unprecedented worldwide mobility of people and educational services, has made trans-national educational transaction imperative. Below are some of the benefits accruable from TNE:

- Increased access to quality education;
- Strengthening academic capacity in research for national development;
- Providing internationally recognized education at one’s space and time;
- Improving international partnership for commercialization of educational commodity;
- Development of indigenous academic potentials;
- Reduction of brain-drain and pressure in local educational systems;
- Promoting regional cooperation for the harmonization of educational qualifications;
- Providing international cross-cultural identity;
- Providing a source of revenue for Government;

- Providing international innovative experience through the deployment of modern technologies in teaching and learning and in particular;
- Reducing Nigerians exodus to neighboring countries for degree programs that may not necessarily be of comparable quality to that in the NUS and
- Limiting wastage of foreign exchange.

Scope of Trans-National Activities

The concept of Trans-National Education is generally taken to mean the importation of education from the “North” to the “South.” In other words, it is seen as a one-way flow of education from the developed countries to the developing countries of the world. This notion had greatly influenced the perception and approach of Nigerians towards it. However, Trans-National Education is two-dimensional, as it involves both the importation and exportation of educational services.

To drive the process of mainstreaming Trans-National Education, and in line with the global community, the National Universities Commission established the Department of Open and Distance Education (now Directorate of Open Distance and e- Learning) in 2011 and created a Division, Cross-Border Education (now Trans – National Education) division, which is charged with the responsibility of handling Trans-National Education issues. This, according to NUC, was informed by the need to put the necessary quality assurance framework and guidelines in place, in line with international best practices for the regulation of the provision of Trans-National Education in the Nigerian University System. These guidelines provide for cross-border provision of university education to Nigeria by foreign providers.

The initial conception of Trans – National Education, was that of providers coming into Nigeria, informed the adoption of only models that encourage providers exporting educational provisions into Nigeria. A remote attempt at exporting education beyond the shores of Nigeria some time ago was truncated most probably because it did not receive necessary approvals. Since this failed attempt, no Nigerian university has indicated interest in exporting education outside the shores of Nigeria. However, with better understanding of TNE as a two-dimensional flow of educational provision, NUC is now well disposed to universities in Nigeria that may wish to take education provision to other climes provided that from the conception of the idea and progressively, the Commission is formally kept in the loop.

Models of Trans-National Education

According to the National Universities Commission (NUC) in its approval guidelines on trans-national education in Nigeria, the following are the various models of Trans-National Education proposed for the Nigerian space.

The Twinning/Articulation Model

In this model, a foreign university (recognized and accredited by competent authorities in its home country) and an approved Nigerian university, collaborate to offer courses, enrich curricula content, pedagogy, and offer degrees with joint or dual certification and/or have articulation arrangements, which involve study on host and home campuses. This may be acceptable to/recognized by government provided that under the articulation arrangements, upon successful completion of an approved course of study, students are awarded degrees of the Nigerian university. However, if the arrangement is such that the Nigerian students in the programme will be awarded the degree of the foreign university, then such students will be required to spend a minimum of two semesters or one academic year on the overseas campus of the foreign university and this would form part of the graduation requirements.

The Branch Campus Model

The Branch Campus Model is one in which a foreign university establishes its campus anywhere in Nigeria, following the NUC standing procedure for establishment of Branch Campus. Programmes offered in the Nigerian campus shall be a replica of [or at least must be of comparable standards with] those offered in the parent institution in the home country and must meet the standards and quality assurance requirements currently applicable to Nigerian Universities.

The Open & Distance Learning (ODL) Model

The ODL model refers to the provision of quality academic programmes and courses leading to the award of degrees, without the constraints of time and space by the foreign Open or Dual Mode Universities. Interested universities are however expected to comply with the ODL model approved for the Nigerian University System which is the ICT-Enabled Supported Blended Learning (IESBL) model. It is the acceptable and practicable model in Nigeria for now. The IESBL model places high premium on the centrality of quality interactive course materials produced in mixed media format, the deployment of appropriate technologies and provision of robust learner support mechanism. Minimum learner-tutor contact in a face-to-face environment and periodic

pen-on-paper examinations are also imperative in this model. The acceptability of the IESBL as the model of choice in the NUS is informed by the Commission's commitment to ensure that while mechanisms are in place to address the problem of access through the veritable tool of ODL, the quality of the ensuing products is not compromised.

Joint/Parallel Degrees Model

a. Joint Degree Option - In this model, a single degree programme is undertaken to obtain a single certificate bearing the signatures of the competent authorities of all degree awarding bodies involved. It is an arrangement whereby providers in different countries collaborate to offer a programme for which students receive qualifications from the providers, or a joint award from the collaborating partners. Arrangements for programme provision and criteria for awarding the qualifications are customized for each collaborative initiative in accordance with national regulations in each country. NUC oversees the necessary quality assurance processing.

b. Parallel Degree Option - In this model, two separate degree programmes are studied alongside each other; leading to two separate awards. It may involve the mutual accreditation of prior learning and or in-course credit transfer as well as some curriculum mapping between both institutions. As prerequisite, a detailed agreement with partners on the legal, academic and financial parameters is painstakingly undertaken.

Independent Institution Model

In this model, the foreign provider (a traditional university, a commercial company or alliance/network) establishes in Nigeria, a stand-alone university to offer courses/programmes. There is usually no "Parent Institution" in the country of the foreign provider and it is therefore independent. According to NUC, the Commission has to work together with the foreign providers on the design, delivery and quality assurance of the academic programmes. The procedures for establishment of private universities are applied.

Acquisition/Merger Model

The Acquisition/Merger model is the amalgamation of two or more legally incorporated foreign universities or interest purchasing a part or 100% of an established university in Nigeria on a mutual agreement between the foreign providers and the Nigerian University and retaining all the terms of the initial license excepting proprietorship, membership of Board of Trustees and some aspects of Governance

Affiliation/Networks Model

This is a model in which different types of ‘public and private’, ‘traditional and new’ providers from various countries collaborate through innovative types of partnerships to establish institutions to deliver courses and programmes in Nigeria through distance or face-to-face modes. A Nigerian degree will be awarded.

Teaching Institutions Model

A foreign provider establishes teaching institutions in Nigeria to support students taking their courses/programmes. The institution may be independent or may be a university in Nigeria. The NUC regulates the operations of these institutions in addition to regulatory measures by the foreign provider.

Teaching Centre Model

A teaching Centre is an institution in Nigeria where a foreign university undertakes part of the course of study away from its home country and completes the remaining in the foreign country. In this model, the institution intending to establish a Teaching Centre must be a full-fledged and accredited university in its home country. There shall be submission of a letter of introduction from the Embassy/Diplomatic Mission of the home country of the parent university. There shall also be evidence that the foreign university is recognized and accredited by competent authorities in its home country for the purpose of offering degree programmes. They could do a part in Nigeria but there must be verifiable evidence that faculty and facilities obtainable at the home institution are also available at the teaching centres. Furthermore, evidence in form of a written confirmation that the students would complete the programme(s) at the parent university after spending a part at the Teaching Centre in Nigeria shall be provided. Not less than 50% of the faculty across board must be from Nigeria.

Franchise Model

This model involves an arrangement whereby a foreign provider authorizes an approved Nigerian University to deliver its programmes/services within Nigeria. The qualification shall be awarded by the foreign provider while NUC and the foreign provider shall be responsible for monitoring, arrangements for teaching, management, assessment, profit-sharing, awarding of credit and qualifications and other activities. This must be customized for each franchise arrangement and

must comply with national regulations, quality assurance regime and eligibility criteria of both institutions.

Statement of the Problem

University education is pivotal for economic development globally. In Nigeria, its primary objectives include instilling values, developing intellectual capacities, and appreciating environmental dynamics. However, a significant number of Nigerian students seek education abroad due to perceived deficiencies in the local system. Despite having the highest number of higher education institutions in Africa, millions of Nigerian youths are unable to secure admission at home. This has made Nigeria a prime target for foreign student recruiters, with countries like the US, UK, Canada, and others attracting large numbers of Nigerian students. Nigerian universities struggle to retain students, who increasingly seek education abroad due to perceived higher standards, better opportunities, and less frustration. This trend, driven by economic instability and policy inconsistency in Nigeria, results in brain drain and capital flights that hinder national development. This study is premised on the author's belief that the implementation of Trans-National Education is a solution to this problem. However, as beneficial as this practice could be, there are seemingly multifaceted issues impeding its effective integration in Nigeria. This study, therefore, seeks to x-ray the benefits and challenges of the integration of TNE in the Nigerian educational system.

Purpose of the study

The study was carried out to determine:

1. The benefits of implementing TNE in Nigeria
2. The challenges of implementing TNE in Nigeria

Research questions

The following research questions were raised to guide this study:

1. What are the benefits of implementing TNE in Nigeria?
2. What are the challenges of implementing TNE in Nigeria?

Methodology

A qualitative research approach was adopted to gain in-depth understanding of the benefits and challenges of the integration of TNE in the Nigerian educational system. To obtain relevant data on this, face-to-face, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with educational

stakeholders who attended a workshop organized by the British Council in Abuja, the Federal Capital of Nigeria. The theme of the workshop was ‘Insights and Engagement Workshop: Examining International Best Practices and Case Studies for TNE Implementation in Nigerian University System’. Purposive sampling was identified as the most appropriate method of selecting respondents. The sample size was determined on the basis of the concept of saturation: the saturation point is reached when additional interviews no longer yield new data on the issues under investigation (Mason, 2010). The saturation point was reached at 10 respondents (6 males and 4 females). Conducting qualitative research requires incorporating certain strategies to augment the credibility of the study during research design and implementation (Noble & Smith, 2015). In this research, the strategies recommended by Noble and Smith (2015) were followed to improve the study’s trustworthiness, rigour, and quality. The American Educational Research Association Code of Ethics (AERA, 2011) was strictly followed throughout the research process. Respondents were asked to participate in the research on a voluntary basis and sign a consent form. Prior to the interview, respondents were appropriately informed about the survey’s intentions and how survey responses would be utilized. Respondents were assured that all information would be kept confidential and that anonymity would be strictly obeyed.

Presentation and Discussion of Findings

- **Benefits of implementing TNE in Nigeria**

According to the result obtained, 100% of the respondents noted that encouraging foreign universities to set up transnational partnerships in Nigeria can help reduce the financial outflow. One of the respondents stated thus: *The quest for foreign education has huge economic implications for Nigeria*. This is in agreement with the position of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) that the growing number of Nigerian students studying abroad has led to the depreciation of the naira against the dollar (Umeh, 2024). The CBN disclosed that, Nigeria spent \$28.65bn on foreign education from 2010 to 2020, with Personal Transport Allowance (PTA) totaling \$58.7billion. According to Umeh (2024), redirecting a portion of the funds to ventures within the country could have significantly strengthened the naira, adding that promoting transnational education in the country is pivotal for alleviating forex pressure and boosting the economy.

A majority (95%) of the respondents agreed that the implementation of TNE will help to reduce the huge gap between demand and supply in the Nigerian higher education sector. Nigeria's higher education sector is facing unprecedented challenges, with some 2 million applicants annually chasing around 750,000 university slots, and there is a risk that the gap will continue to widen. Nigeria's population of over 200 million is growing at a rate of 3.2 per cent annually, which means it will double within the nearest future (Oyinlola & Whitehead, 2024). The fast-growing population of higher education seeker in Nigeria and the problem of infrastructural deficit in many Nigerian universities have resulted in the overcrowding of the universities. The implementation of TNE will help to ease the pressure on these institutions.

Many of the respondent also noted that the implementation of TNE will help increase access to quality education in Nigeria. One of the respondents reacted thus: Many TNE programmes are governed by the quality assurance standards of the parent institutions abroad. These standards, especially from developed countries, often surpass those of local institutions in terms of curriculum design, teaching methodologies, research engagement, and assessment techniques. The collaboration between Nigerian higher institutions and foreign institutions can lead to capacity building for Nigerian institutions through faculty training, curriculum development, resource sharing and joint research initiatives. This improves indigenous institutions' ability to offer high-quality programmes independently over time.

The respondents unanimously agreed that studying abroad can be prohibitively expensive due to tuition fees, travel, and living costs. For instance, tuition fees in countries such as the UK can range from £10,000 to £30,000 annually for undergraduates—rising even higher for specialized programmes—while living costs add thousands more per year. It is estimated that over the decade from 2010 to 2020, Nigeria spent approximately US \$28.65 billion on foreign education, with an additional US \$58.7 billion in associated personal travel allowances—a clear economic drain. Transnational Education (TNE) helps reduce the cost of earning international degrees, offering a more economically viable alternative for many students. This model allows Nigerians to obtain internationally recognized qualifications—either by studying locally or online—without the full burden of overseas tuition, accommodation, and travel.

Responses also showed a unanimous agreement that TNE helps to reduce brain drain. Many students who go abroad for education fail to return due to better employment opportunities,

security, infrastructure, and quality of life abroad. TNE mitigates this risk by delivering the same academic content and qualifications within the home country, thus maintaining the students' ties to local contexts, cultures, and responsibilities. By providing access to internationally recognized qualifications locally, therefore, TNE allows students to gain global competencies without leaving their home country. This reduces the likelihood of permanent emigration that typically follows studying abroad; especially when students establish careers or settle in host countries after graduation. This finding is in agreement with the submission of Knight (2016) that TNE can "retain talent within the country and reduce the loss of human capital.

Furthermore, 90% of the respondents indicated that the encouragement of TNE in Nigeria will strengthen the nation's e-learning infrastructure and promote digital literacy among students, which is a key skill in the global workforce. This is clear because TNE programmes often rely on digital platforms, making use of virtual classrooms, e-libraries, and recorded lectures.

Challenges of Implementing Transnational Education (TNE) in Nigeria

While Transnational Education (TNE), among other benefits, holds great promise for expanding access to quality international education and reducing brain drain in Nigeria, its implementation is not without significant challenges as observed by respondents. These challenges span regulatory, infrastructural, financial, academic, and sociocultural domains. Below is a detailed discussion:

Regulatory and Policy Gaps: A major challenge facing TNE in Nigeria is the absence of a comprehensive national policy framework for its promotion, regulation and quality assurance. Without clear policies, there is often confusion over accreditation, degree recognition, and institutional responsibilities. According to Obasi (2021), Nigeria lacks a coherent policy to guide the operations of foreign providers and ensure quality control in TNE delivery. Furthermore, the National Universities Commission (NUC) and other regulatory bodies have limited capacity to monitor and evaluate the growing number of cross-border programs, leading to unregulated or substandard offerings.

Infrastructure Deficiencies: Reliable digital infrastructure is essential for online and blended TNE programs. However, frequent power outages, poor internet connectivity, and limited access to ICT facilities in many Nigerian institutions hinder the smooth delivery of TNE. Osamiro, Ekwukoma & Omoregie (2023) identify inadequate technological infrastructure as a critical barrier to the success of online and distance learning programs in Nigeria.

High Costs for Students and Providers: Although TNE is often promoted as a cost-effective alternative to studying abroad, some TNE programmes remain expensive for average Nigerian families, particularly those offered through private institutions or foreign university branches. These costs may include tuition, fees for foreign certification, and technology access. On the provider side, setting up TNE partnerships requires large capital investment, staff development, and technological tools, which may discourage Nigerian institutions with limited funding.

Quality Assurance Concerns: Maintaining academic quality and equivalency between local and foreign TNE programmes is challenging. There are often disparities in teaching methods, learning outcomes, and assessment standards. Where foreign institutions fail to adapt content to local contexts, graduates may be ill-prepared for the Nigerian labour market demands. TNE programmes that simply replicate foreign curricula without localization may lack relevance and impact.

Limited Awareness and Misconceptions: Many students and parents lack understanding of what TNE entails, often confusing it with low-quality distance learning or diploma mills. Others may not view TNE degrees as equivalent to those earned abroad, affecting uptake and societal acceptance.

Institutional Capacity Constraints: Many Nigerian higher education institutions lack the administrative, academic, and technical capacity to effectively manage TNE partnerships. This includes weaknesses in curriculum design, international collaboration, e-learning systems, and student support services.

Academic Staff Resistance and Training Gaps: Some faculty members may resist TNE models due to concerns over workload, training requirements, or lack of familiarity with online delivery methods. Without adequate capacity building and incentives, academic staff may not fully embrace TNE strategies.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, below are recommendations for the effective implementation of Transnational Education (TNE) in Nigeria:

1. The Federal Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the National Universities Commission (NUC), should develop and implement a more comprehensive policy framework for TNE. A formal policy will provide guidance on registration, accreditation, curriculum adaptation,

degree recognition, and the roles of foreign and local institutions. It will also protect students from fraudulent or low-quality programs.

2. For effective implementation of TNE in Nigeria, there is the need for improve in digital and physical infrastructure, because TNE models often rely on online delivery. The government and institutions should invest in reliable internet connectivity, electricity supply, and ICT infrastructure, especially in public universities and underserved areas.

3. Relevant government agencies and tertiary institutions must make deliberate efforts to woo reputable foreign institutions to invest in TNE programmes in Nigeria. Government can provide incentives for institutions that are interested in TNE partnership.

4. There is the need to promote awareness and sensitization campaigns for wider acceptance and understanding of TNE. Relevant agencies and institutions should launch public awareness campaigns to educate students, parents, employers, and institutions about the value, structure, and legitimacy of TNE programs.

Wider acceptance and understanding of TNE can lead to increased enrollment and improved recognition of TNE degrees in the job market.

5. Skilled and motivated staff are essential for delivering quality TNE programmes and ensuring smooth academic and administrative operations. Therefore, government should build capacity of academic and administrative staff. There should be training and continuous professional development programmes for university lecturers and administrators in areas such as online pedagogy, TNE program management, and international collaboration.

6. The Nigerian government can leverage Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) in encouraging TNE. That is, the government can engage the private sector in providing resources, innovation, and sustainability requirements for TNE programs while easing the burden on public institutions.

Conclusion

Nigeria is a huge market for foreign student recruiters due to the large number of students seeking education abroad. This trend, driven by some identified push and pull factors, can only be reversed by harnessing the benefits of TNE. A successful TNE implementation in Nigeria requires, among other things, robust regulation, strategic investment in digital and physical infrastructure, deliberate efforts to encourage reputable foreign institutions to go into TNE partnership with tertiary institutions in Nigeria, strengthening of awareness and sensitization, institutional

readiness, and stakeholder collaboration. If well-implemented, TNE can democratize access to international education, reduce educational migration, and position Nigeria as a regional education hub.

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